

# Activism and intentionality in international alternative breaks: Civic education, global community, and service learning





# Trujillo, Colombia



si mi sangre  
contribuye para que en trujillo  
amanezca y florezca la paz  
que tanto estamos necesitando  
gustosamente la derramaré



# Program Components & Effective Practices

1. Alternative Breaks as a model of Global Service Learning
2. Student Leadership
3. Critical Reflection & Awareness of Justice Issues
4. Community Relationships, Reciprocity & Community Voice
5. Integrating Into the Curriculum
6. University Role in Activism



# Alternative Breaks @ American University

Service-oriented learning trips that facilitate participant reflection on their role in the global community through:

- o Service
- o Academic inquiry
- o Student Leadership
- o Activism – trips address social justice issues and structural systems of
  - o inequality, injustice, oppression, and marginalization
- o Self-awareness/examine own privilege
- o Reciprocity and immersion; living within the local communities and learn from community leaders





# Student Leader Perspective

- o Importance of peer leadership
  - o Dynamic, complex role
  - o Training
  - o Group dynamics
- o Avoid “development by monument”
  - o Engaging in a process
  - o Accountability to maintain community relationships
- o Delegating leadership roles
  - o Post trip activism



# Awareness of justice issues

- o From Overwhelmed to Empowered
- o From Service to Solidarity
- o Enduring Commitment to Justice.







# Guatemala Human Rights Commission, Community Partner Organization

# Reflection on Integrating Alternative Breaks Into the University Classroom

- Background: Undergraduate General Education Course, *Education for International Development*
- Ongoing Tension: Power Differentials
- Process: Constant Tweaking
  - Groupings
  - Country Selection
  - Community Partners
  - Avoiding White Man's Burden





Activism helps the university, though not always amicably.

1998: Four AU students arrested in Burma  
2012: Aung San Suu Kyi received award on campus

2010 – 2012:  
Students tutor staff,  
then campaign for  
better workers' rights.



# Alternative Breaks as University-sponsored Activism

- o Relinquishing control, while still supporting: student 'post-trip activism' is integral to Alternative Breaks.
- o University engages beyond service, into activism both on and off-campus
  - o Normative commitment to justice issues is explicit
  - o Internal struggles for university are sometimes apparent; risk & pressure from students
- o **Strategic plan commitment to social responsibility**
- o Assessing impact of Alternative Breaks: an ongoing challenge



# Thank you

o [www.american.edu/altbreak](http://www.american.edu/altbreak)

